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NEWS RELEASE
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NEWS RELEASE
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Delaware Traffic Fatalities Rise Slightly in 2008
Alcohol-related deaths drop while pedestrian and bicycle deaths increase

Dover – A New Year’s Eve fatal pedestrian crash brought the total number of people killed in Delaware in 2008 to 122. That means four more people lost their lives in traffic crashes on Delaware roadways last year than in 2007, when 118 people died as a result of vehicle crashes. Those traffic deaths reflected a 20% drop in fatalities from the previous year, 2006.

“With national fatality numbers expected to fall, we truly wish Delaware could have experienced a similar decrease,” said Tricia Roberts, Director of the Office of Highway Safety, “Every traffic death we learn of is a tragedy in our eyes, and to see the numbers increase instead of decrease is heartbreaking for all who are committed to saving lives on our roads. We are encouraged however, that we were able to make progress in some key areas, while still realizing that there is much work ahead of us if we are to make continued improvements.”

In 2008 alcohol-related fatalities dropped by nearly 12 percentage points. Last year 42 people (or 34%) of traffic deaths involved alcohol, compared to the 54 (or 46%) that were alcohol-related last year. OHS credits the high visibility enforcement and awareness efforts utilized under its *Checkpoint Strikeforce* impaired driving prevention campaign for the decrease.

Also in 2008, speed and aggressive driving as factors in fatal crashes decreased. Last year speed was listed as a factor in fatal crashes 20 times compared to 27 times in 2007. Aggressive driving, of which speed is a part, decreased from 61% in 2007, to 51% in 2008. In July, September and October of this year, OHS conducted its Stop Aggressive Driving campaign, but revised it to focus specifically on stopping speeding drivers. Law enforcement issued over 2,700 speeding citations in that three month period. A statewide TV, radio, and billboard campaign accompanied the enforcement.

There was again success in the area of increasing seat belt use in 2008. Seat belt use rose to an all time high of 91% statewide, from its previous level of 87% in 2007. OHS conducted the highly successful *Click It or Ticket* campaign twice in 2008. The first time was a shortened version of the May effort in February, and was focused on increasing night time seat belt use. Then in May, OHS partnered with law enforcement statewide to conduct the full blown three week mobilization, along with states nationwide.

Motorcycle deaths remained nearly the same in 2008. Sixteen motorcyclists were killed in crashes last year, compared to 17 in 2007. The average age of the motorcyclist killed last year was 36. In 2009, OHS will continue its valuable partnership with the State's Motorcycle Rider Education Advisory Committee in an effort to reduce deaths further.

Unfortunately, there were two areas which saw increases in traffic deaths: pedestrians and bicyclists. Pedestrian deaths increased from 17 in 2007 to 22 in 2008. Primary factors in these fatal crashes continue to be pedestrians who do not cross at marked intersections, who are walking at night without wearing reflective clothing or carrying flashlights as required by state law or who are walking under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs.

Last year five bicyclists were killed in crashes on Delaware roads. There were no bicycle fatalities in 2007. In at least four of the five cases, police report that the bicyclist turned into the path of a motor vehicle.

As 2009 begins, OHS has already completed plans for its first DUI enforcement mobilization of the new year, centered around the NFL playoffs. Twenty-six state and local law enforcement agencies will be conducting DUI saturation patrols on Saturdays and Sundays during the NFL playoffs starting on Saturday January 3rd.

For more information on Office of Highway Safety programs please visit our website at www.ohs.delaware.gov.

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